



## GUIDELINES FOR FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS



Serving the People  
of Washington

August 1998

These guidelines relate to the requirements involved when application is made for the designation and valuation of forest land under the Timber and Forest Land Laws (Chapter 84.33.130 RCW). The definition of the word “designation” as used here is different from its use in describing forest land of long-term commercial significance under the Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW).

These guidelines may be used when a management plan is required for the classifying of land as open space timber under the Open Space Law (Chapter 84.34 RCW).

Some counties may choose to use these guidelines when considering approval of conversion option harvest plans submitted under provisions of the Washington Forest Practices Rules and Regulations (Title 222.20.050(2) WAC).

An application for the designation as forest land must address certain requirements. (RCW 84.33.130 (2)(a)...(n) and (3)(a)...(c)).

RCW 84.33.130 (2)(d), asks “Whether there is a forest management plan for such land.” This is one of the considerations for the County Assessor to use in determining the eligibility of property qualifying for designation as forest land and to be valued as such.

In addition, the following items are addressed in: RCW 84.33.130 (2)

- (a) “A legal description...;”
- (c) “A brief description of the timber on such land, or if the timber has been harvested, the owner’s plan for restocking;”
- (e) “..the nature and extent of implementation of such plan;”
- (f) “Whether such land is used for grazing;”
- (h) “Whether such land and the applicant are in compliance with the restocking, forest management, fire protection, insect and disease control and forest debris provisions of Title 76 RCW or any applicable regulations...;”
- (n) “...in contiguous ownership of twenty or more acres which is primarily devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber.”

and RCW 84.33.130 (3)

- (a) (i) “if such land has been recently harvested or supports a growth of brush or non-commercial type timber, and the application includes a plan for restocking within three years...”

These are all normally included in a comprehensive forest management plan. A complete forest management plan is essential when determining if a property is suitable for forest land designation.

While in most cases it is recommended that a management plan be prepared by a professional forester or other land use expert, it is also recognized that certain landowners have, through self-education, become very competent in undertaking the management of their forest land. A management plan prepared by a landowner who has made the effort to become a competent steward of the land should be accepted if it meets the criteria of these guidelines.

### **LAND USE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

The foundation of a forest land management plan is the establishment and documentation of the land use goals and objectives of the landowner.

A formal forest land management plan should have, as its introduction, a statement of the landowner's aspirations and intentions for their property and the forest trees to be nurtured on it.

This statement is the basis for the covenant the property owner is entering into with the other citizens of their county. Other property owners gain an interest in this private forest land when property taxes on it are reduced. The ability to designate a parcel of land under the forest tax law to be valued as forest land is contingent upon the intention of the owner to manage the land as forest land, including the commercial production and harvest of timber.

Today there is a growing awareness of enlightened approaches to forestry. It is now recognized that forests enhance the earth in many ways in addition to the production of wood fiber. Properly managed forests provide protection for our water supplies, help in minimizing soil erosion, and slow the runoff from rain and snow melt, thus helping to prevent storm and flood damage. Forests can be managed in such a way as to provide habitat for wildlife, preserve scenic and recreational spaces, and contribute to the overall natural ecological equilibrium.

It is important to understand that timber production need not be the landowner's only objective. However, the law does require that, to be eligible for designation, the management plan and the management of the property must be consistent with the commercial production and harvest of timber.

The intent of the forest tax law is to encourage the retention of property in forest land use plus add quality acreage to the commercial forest land base. The goal and objectives statement should be evaluated with the foregoing in mind when the application for designation of the property is under consideration.

### **MAPPING AND INVENTORY:**

To manage a forest using accepted forestry techniques, a professional forester usually begins by acquiring aerial photography of the property. The property ownership lines corresponding to the legal description are drawn out on the photo (commonly a black-and-white 1:12,000 scale photo obtainable from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources).

An overlay for the photo or other type of map is prepared delineating the various stands of trees based on differences such as management needs, tree age, stocking percentage, tree species, and soil productivity. The board foot volumes for older stands of trees are often determined by timber cruises; however, a timber cruise is not a necessity in a management plan.

Soil productivity information is obtainable from the forest land grading maps which are available from the county assessor's office. Additional soil information can be provided by the Soil Conservation Service or the Department of Natural Resources.

Information about wildlife habitats from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife may be included.

All environmental impact considerations of forest management practices on the property should be researched and noted.

The process of collecting the information needed for the overlay or map and thus the management plan is what a “Forest Inventory” consists of.

### **ACTION PLAN:**

Based on the stated goals and objectives and using the information gathered for the forest inventory, the next step is to spell out the actual managing practices to be used. A stand-by-stand evaluation should be conducted and any necessary remedies such as restocking, pruning, pre-commercial thinning, etc., should be noted. Solutions for any environmental problems that exist, such as stream protection, should be formulated. A scheduling of any remedial forest practices should be part of the plan. A commitment to particular harvest dates is NOT required as the benefits of older forests are becoming better understood, accepted, and are often desirable.

The preparation of the above steps are typical in a management plan, which is an essential part of the application for the designation of property as forest land under the Forest Tax Law (RCW 84.33) or the Open Space Law (RCW 84.34).

### **IN SUMMARY:**

The management plan to be submitted to the County Assessor’s office as part of an application for designation should consist of:

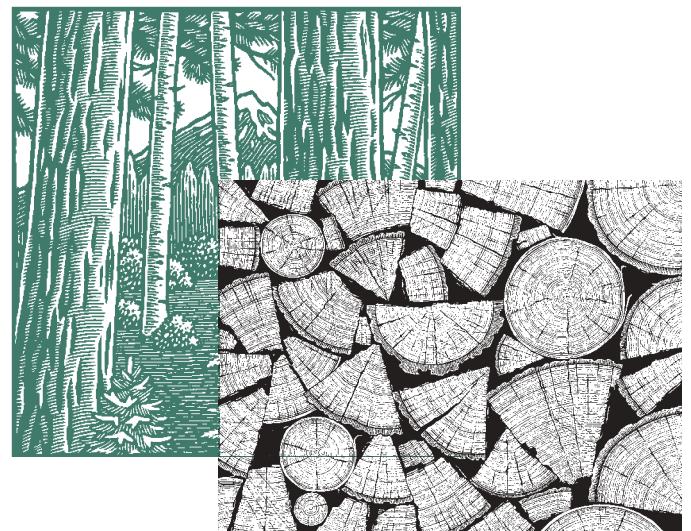
1. A goal and objectives statement.
2. An aerial photo or a good quality copy of the aerial photo showing property lines, access roads, etc.
3. A photo overlay or map delineating forest types according to management needs.
4. Soil productivity information.
5. A summary of stand treatments planned.
6. An outline of how situations of environmental concern will be addressed.

The management plan filed with the county should be upgraded: 1) at the time of a harvest that reduces the stocking below state forest practice regulation levels; 2) when the property changes ownership; or 3) when conditions change that may hinder the management of the property for forest land.

In general, if the landowner has an “Approved Forest Stewardship Plan” as part of the Department of Natural Resources’ Forest Stewardship Program, or a “Conservation Plan” developed by the Soil Conservation Service, it will meet the requirements for a management plan for designated forest land if the land is stocked or will soon be stocked with commercial species of trees. [see RCW 84.33.130(3)(a)(i)] and meets the other basic requirements of RCW 84.33 or RCW 84.34.

It is possible that there is property now under designation status that does not have an adequate management plan on file. If an inspection of the property casts doubt on whether it is being managed as forest land (for example it is not adequately stocked with commercial species of trees or it is not being used primarily for the growing of trees) an optional step before removal from the program could be to request a management plan from the landowner.

Periodically, a review should be conducted to verify the continued compliance with the provisions of the management plan.



## SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE:

For more information on forest land management, consult a professional forester. Following is a list of recommended resources.

### **The Association of Consulting Foresters**

5410 Grosvenor Lane  
Suite 205  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814-2194  
(301) 530-6795

### **The Society of American Foresters**

5400 Grosvenor Lane  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814-2198  
(301) 897-8720

County office of **Washington State University Cooperative Extension** (Check your phone book for local office phone numbers.)

The State of Washington **Department of Natural Resources**, in cooperation with the **Department of Fish and Wildlife**, has a program offering technical assistance in applying environmental and economic resource management principles to non-industrial private forest land owners. It's called the Forest Stewardship Incentives Program. You may reach the program at:

Washington Department of Natural Resources  
PO Box 47046  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7046  
1-800-527-3305

**The U.S. Department of Agriculture - Soil Conservation Service** provides conservation planning assistance for both agricultural and forest lands. Please check the federal government section of your telephone book for the local office nearest you.

**The State of Washington Department of Revenue Forest Tax Section** has a Forest Property Tax Program providing assistance to the counties, including the review of Forest Management Plans. Also, advice on forest land grading, and all other aspects of the designating and classifying of forest land is available. You may reach the Department by writing or calling:

Washington State Department of Revenue  
Special Programs Division, Forest Tax Section  
PO Box 47472  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7472  
1-800-548-8829



<http://dor.wa.gov>

*To inquire about the availability of this publication in an alternate format for the visually impaired or a language other than English, please call (360) 486-2342.  
Teletype (TTY) users please call 1-800-451-7985.*



*Serving the People of Washington*



Printed on recycled paper

Prepared by the Taxpayer Services Division  
FS0024 8/7/98